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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Workshop on Ensuring Access to Social Services of Under-served Populations

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1996/7, the Economic and Social Council decided on the substantive items of the agenda for the Commission for Social Development at its future sessions and a multi-year programme of work for the consideration of priority themes. The Commission discussed the eradication of poverty at its special session in 1996; it considered productive employment and sustainable livelihoods at its thirty-fifth regular session in 1997. In 1998, at its thirty-sixth session, the Commission gave attention to promoting social integration and the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. The priority themes for the thirty-seventh session of the Commission in 1999 will be social services for all and an initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

2. In its resolution 1995/60, the Council decided that the Commission for Social Development should establish the practice of opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society so as to enhance knowledge and understanding of social development and the exchange of information and experience. Further, in its resolution 1996/7, the Council reaffirmed the need for ensuring an effective partnership and cooperation between Governments and the relevant actors of civil society, the social partners and the major groups as defined in Agenda 21,[1] including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, in the implementation of and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, and for ensuring their involvement in the planning, elaboration, implementation and evaluation of social policies at the national level.

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3. Accordingly, in preparing for the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development and in response to the expressed intentions of the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Secretariat organized an expert workshop on ensuring access to social services of under-served populations, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The workshop was hosted by the National Institute of Development Administration of Thailand and held at Bangkok from 2 to 6 November 1998. Financial support for the participation of experts from developing countries was provided by the Department for International Development of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The workshop brought together experts from all world regions and observers from the United Nations system and civil society.

4. The report of the workshop is annexed below.

Notes

[1] In addition to the social partners (representatives of trade unions and of business and industry), the other major groups identified in Agenda 21 are women; children and youth; indigenous people; non-governmental organizations; local authorities; the scientific and technological community; and farmers.

Annex

Report of the Workshop on Ensuring Access to Social Services of Under-served Populations

Bangkok, Thailand, 2–6 November 1998

I. Introduction

1. Ensuring access by all to basic social services was one of the key goals to which Governments committed themselves at the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in 1995. It was recognized that good quality services, responding to the needs of users and delivered in an efficient and effective manner, were essential in order to improve the welfare of individuals, families and groups and to promote the quality of life and prosperity of societies.

2. While many and diverse efforts are being made to expand the range and coverage of services and while experimentation and innovation in their organization and delivery are not lacking, in order to improve quality and to ensure that services respond to real needs, the overall assessment must be that the systems currently existing in most places fail large numbers of people. Millions remain unreached or under-served by social services, whether considered in terms of the quantity or in terms of the quality and appropriateness of the services provided.

3. The Workshop examined the factors that account for the current unsatisfactory state of affairs. It reviewed the ways in which needs are perceived and assessed, services are conceived, planned and designed, resources are allocated and provision is organized, in order to analyse why current provision falls short and to identify possible new approaches for advancing towards the goals expressed at the Summit.

4. Apart from the familiar, ever-present factors of lack of resources or insufficient priority for social programmes within the distribution of available resources, perhaps the single most important factor is the failure to devise mechanisms and processes that can effectively reconcile and unite the often different and sometimes widely diverging interests of providers and potential users — that is, the lack of viable forms of partnership among all the concerned social actors, partnerships based on mutually agreed and accepted rights and responsibilities.

II. Social services and the "under-served"

The concept of the "under-served"

5. Traditionally, social services are conceptualized as services that add to the welfare of individuals and at the same time meet the needs of society for integration and development. The success of social services is, therefore, measured by the extent to which they are utilized to meet recognized individual and community requirements. Social services should be understood in a broad way. They include basic necessities such as nutrition, clean water, housing, sanitation, education, assistance in seeking employment, transport, security, and participation in cultural and social life. When organized by society, they also include benefits and services to people with needs arising from old age, incapacity to work, unemployment, death of a family breadwinner, raising a family, illness, maternity and other contingencies and problems.

6. Social services perform many functions. Some are preventive; others may be curative. Some are aimed at compensation, while still others cater to the development of persons, communities and society. Of course there are various national and cultural contexts, but in a general sense, to be under-served may be understood in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

7. Quantitative aspects of what it means to be under-served may include:

(a) Receiving insufficient services, or no services at all;

(b) Receiving services that do not meet desires or needs, including getting the wrong provision or service;

(c) Receiving fewer services than others in similar situations;

(d) Being excluded from services as a result of discrimination based on an attribute such as caste, class, age, gender, religion, region, ethnicity, physical or mental characteristics, social background (criminal record, drug use), political or sexual orientation, language, employment

status, occupation, family situation (such as single parenthood), poverty or inability to pay.

8. Qualitative aspects of what it means to be under-served may include:

(a) Receiving services that do not meet desired standards;

(b) Receiving services that are unacceptable to the user, advocacy groups or professionals;

(c) Receiving services that are of a lower quality than services received by others;

(d) Receiving services in an inappropriate fashion — for example, provided by an unskilled or untrained person.

9. Importantly, aspects of quality concern not only the delivery and receipt of services but also the way in which users are informed and included in decision-making, implementation, monitoring and the auditing of the services. It can also come in the form of empowering individuals and communities to stand on their own feet. It follows from this definition that it is not possible to identify or list definitive groups of people as always constituting the under-served. Moreover, in any society the group of under-served is likely to be heterogeneous in the sense that it will consist of different people with different needs and service requirements. Similarly, people may have similar needs but encounter unequal access and quality of services.

10. It should be noted, nevertheless, that certain groups tend to suffer the brunt of discrimination in many societies, and this would include being under-served in the provision of social services. Some of the groups that may be under-served include people living in poverty, women, older persons, children, migrants and refugees, and minorities, however defined. The composition of the under-served also changes over time. For example, women may often constitute a disproportionate share of the under-served, but this may not always be the case. In some societies, older persons will likely be under-served, whereas in others they may be quite well served. People living in poverty or who otherwise lack resources are most likely to be under-served. At the same time, the fact of being under-served may increase poverty for individuals and groups; in this regard, efforts to overcome problems of under-service will contribute to eradicating poverty.

How to identify the under-served

11. The notion of under-service must, quite clearly, be understood in relation to needs. Underlying the concept of under-service is an assumption that equal distribution of services is desirable. In each situation, it is necessary to examine whether existing social services leave populations under-served. Unfortunately, the various measures typically used to make this assessment are not always reliable. If the measure is of inputs (such as how much is spent to provide services), the result may be unsatisfactory on two counts: first, because needs differ; and secondly, because actual outcomes are not necessarily proportional to inputs. If the measure focuses on outcomes, there are other difficulties, particularly because outcomes depend so much on individual circumstances and capacities. It would be wise to use a combination of measures, as available.

12. It is important to restate that the notion of what it means to be under-served is likely to vary within countries or regions, particularly at different levels of development. The demand for social services and the identification of who comprises the under-served populations will also differ, depending on contexts. While contexts themselves will vary in different countries, or even over time, it is useful to identify some of the major ones that may affect populations and their need or demand for social services:

(a) War and conflict often make it impossible to provide social services to large segments of a population. People may become victimized by such conflicts, and their need for services may be expected to increase as a result. For example, war or conflict may cause people to suffer serious injuries leading to disability. Natural disasters can have the same effect, although perhaps for shorter periods of time. They can be expected to increase the demand for social services, because, commonly, the welfare of people who suffer as a result becomes the responsibility of society;

(b) Sudden and sharp contraction of demand as a result of structural adjustment programmes can increase the need for social services while simultaneously reducing the resources available to provide them. Greater reliance on market mechanisms, as sometimes suggested, for the allocation of services such as education, health and old age pensions would likely leave larger populations under-served;

(c) Ageing populations and the accompanying change in morbidity patterns in several developing countries at low levels of per capita income make it very difficult to provide adequate curative services, with the danger that they would become a severely under-served population;

(d) The rapid onset of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, which kills economically active young adults, can suddenly create under-served populations of young children who are orphaned and old parents whose adult children have died;

(e) The capacity to collect resources for community purposes ("taxable capacity") differs among societies, and those poorer in that capacity may be unable to serve their populations adequately with social services. This is particularly true in countries with large numbers of people living in poverty. The phenomenon also occurs where constituent states in a federal system differ in their capacity to raise tax revenue and are not compensated by grants from the federal Government;

(f) The less vociferous, the worse organized and those more distant from centres of power are often among the under-served. While literacy is an important determinant of access to services, lack of literacy in the languages of administration can also define the under-served;

(g) Those denied political power because there is no democratically elected Government, because there are severe limits on the freedom of expression or because they belong to groups which have no access to power are invariably under-served with social services. Particular ethnic groups, castes and social classes are especially affected.

Determining the needs of the under-served

13. It is important to recognize that usually needs vary and change and that they are often defined without (or with little) regard to the wishes of the stipulated beneficiaries. In most cases, the needs that are expressed are in fact the objectives of the different actors responsible for service provision and not necessarily the actual needs of clients. Often, information which is aggregated at the national level and collected by third parties is used to set priorities, and it may not be detailed enough to differentiate the needs of specific groups. Within sectors, the process of deciding what needs should receive attention is left to professionals and bureaucrats, whose focus may be broad-based and generic rather than context-specific. This can result in services that are inappropriate to local needs. Allocation of resources to different service components and target populations may also be done exclusively by technocrats; this can result in services which are designed to meet professional criteria rather than the needs of potential beneficiaries. The process of deciding needs may reflect international goals, national political agendas, mandates of non-governmental organizations, and/or donor or private interests, rather than the desires of the immediate beneficiaries of the process. In spite of all the recent rhetoric about participation, when it comes to the actual provision of services, the beneficiaries are often only involved as passive recipients.

14. Social services are often provided without regard to the variety of different population groups, on the basic assumption that the needs of different population categories are homogenous. The organization and the delivery of services tend to be based on single models with uniform definitions of appropriate services. There may also be an assumption that the various population groups have equal capacity to demand and obtain access to social services. It may also be true that clients see their needs holistically, while providers tend to view them in a compartmentalized manner. The use of competing and conflicting models of service delivery by service providers is also common and may lead to confusion or cynicism on the part of potential beneficiaries.

15. There is a great deal of experimentation going on in service delivery. This has mostly been initiated by central agencies and is sometimes imposed on service providers. The result has often been to deprive the beneficiaries of any sense of ownership of the services. The emphasis is too often placed on convenience for service providers, and there is little flexibility in the mechanisms used to deliver services. The lack of flexibility means that services do not respond quickly enough to changing circumstances or individual needs, and this can create conditions in which populations are under-served. The under-served populations lack the political and technical power to influence either the types of services offered or the delivery mechanisms.

16. Provision of social services involves many stakeholders and targeted individuals or groups. It is not easy to determine a single method for setting priorities or for establishing standards of quality, effectiveness or efficiency. Various perspectives should be encouraged and entertained.

17. Since there are a large number of stakeholders involved in the provision of social services, it is imperative that all of the perspectives be recognized. In particular, the perspectives of populations that are currently under-served should be given priority. Their equal, active and full participation in the processes of planning, implementing, evaluating and monitoring of social services should be facilitated. Through such a client-oriented perspective, a close examination of the current state of the social services will reveal issues such as the criteria for their organization, delivery, and assessment.

18. It is very important to establish criteria for identifying the prospective users and the types of services to be delivered. It is equally important to ensure that the criteria be decided by all stakeholders together and in partnership with the users and that they be made transparent.

Barriers to access to social services

19. Among the numerous factors that may cause populations to be under-served with regard to the provision of social services include and which may vary from place to place and from time to time, the following have appeared in many contexts:

(a) Political barriers, including lack of representation in local and national government. Council members may not be democratically elected or representative of all groups; certain groups, including women and youth, may be consciously excluded;

(b) Legal barriers and procedural obstacles and restrictions, such as laws that do not guarantee land title for specific groups (such as indigenous people or women); laws that restrict harm-reduction activities (such as working with people suffering from HIV/AIDS); law enforcement officers who are not sensitized to social service approaches and works;

(c) Physical barriers, including remoteness, may mean that the facilities are located in places where access is difficult, thus discouraging use;

(d) The attitudes, or "world view", of professionals, whose ideas, conceptions and assumptions may affect the provision of social services. With reference to indigenous people, for example, service providers may adopt the notion of the "noble savage" — the view that indigenous people are exotic and mysterious and that their cultures are somehow akin to museum artifacts which need to be preserved regardless of their own perceptions or interests. Such a view may lead providers to view indigenous people as inanimate objects and to make decisions without regard to their views;

(e) Problems in maintaining professionalism among governmental officers and social workers, or a sense of "burn-out" among workers. In many countries, social work is under-valued, resulting in low pay and poor working conditions which can demotivate workers; hence there is often burn-out and high turnover among social workers;

(f) Social stigmas, particularly for individuals or groups that have been engaged in illegal or criminal activity or that have existed on the "margins" of society. Such individuals may find it extremely difficult to take advantage of social services to become reintegrated into society;

(g) Nationalist sentiment, leading to a devaluing of imported techniques or practices, may hinder both providers and recipients from adopting potentially useful ideas and programmes.

20. Delivery systems that are too complex and sophisticated may prove too difficult for beneficiaries to access, resulting in a failure of acceptance and use. Delivery systems can be made more easily accessible to users in at least two ways. First, obstacles or barriers (including political, legal, bureaucratic, physical, financial, social and informational) should be reduced. Secondly, the efficiency of the delivery system itself should be continually improved.

III. Enhancing service delivery

The current state of quality in social services

21. Currently, the users of social services generally have little influence over the types of services provided or how they are delivered. The approach commonly adopted is one in which service providers and governmental officials decide types of services and quality standards. This can create a lack of communication which results in an information gap between the providers of services and the users of those services. Service quality can best be assessed by the beneficiaries of the services. This applies to all sectors of social service.

22. Many social services fail to respond adequately to the needs of the users, because providers often do not adopt a client-focused approach. The result may be a situation whereby social service provision misses its target groups altogether or fails to provide the quality needed. Incorporating the client's point of view in the planning and delivery of social services will contribute significantly to the accessibility, quality and effectiveness of those services.

23. Services may be of poor quality for a number of reasons. On one hand, provision may be inflexible, and services may fail to keep up with changing social or economic conditions, thus no longer meeting the evolving needs of users. On the other hand, political or administrative considerations may bring about change which is inappropriate to user needs. Sometimes service provision changes with each new administration — or even with each new director. This can lead to inconsistencies in provision and confusion about how to obtain access to services, and it is the users who suffer. It is essential to monitor and evaluate service provision and to incorporate innovations based on appropriate feedback, while avoiding inconsistency and change for its own sake.

Improving the quality of social services

24. It is important to establish standards for measuring service quality. To do this, criteria ought to be established for evaluating social services. These standards should be based on a common understanding of needs and desirable outcomes, as developed by clients, service providers and governmental officials working together. There is also a need for systematic evaluation of services, based on continuous feedback provided by both the providers and the users of services.

25. A more formal mechanism for auditing service delivery should be established in order to maintain standards of quality. The body given responsibility for auditing should be formed of experts nominated and agreed by all stakeholders of the process. It should act in a neutral, objective way. It should attempt to improve the accountability of both governments and service providers. Accountability should refer not only to financial considerations but also to programme standards. This should result in improved satisfaction of the needs of clients as well as the capacities of service providers. In the context of auditing exercises, it would be useful to encourage participatory research activities aiming to improve the acquisition and sharing of information and to facilitate the planning of social services and the development of new and more appropriate programmes.

26. The organization of social services has implications for the efficient allocation and use of resources. A well-organized social service system also contributes to higher degrees of effectiveness and thus legitimacy and acceptance, not only by recipients but also by professionals and contributors. The ease with which people understand how the system operates will help determine how well they are able to obtain access to services.

27. A well organized system should also be able to respond effectively to the needs of users with multiple problems. Many countries operate segmented systems of social services, with specific agencies maintaining responsibility for particular risks and needs. This often leads to inefficiency and inflexible resource allocation, as some needs, regions and levels of social service delivery are inadequately served or under-funded. At the same time, other regions may experience redundancy in the provision of services.

28. In practice, some countries have benefited from introducing the "one-shop" principle, which organizes various types of social services in one centrally located place. This may typically be in the local town hall, where other public service functions, such as the tax authorities and local planning agencies, are located. If people can go to a place not immediately identified as a social service agency, visits may be encouraged and social stigma reduced, because the embarrassment sometimes associated with reliance on social services is eliminated. When combined with more transparency and ease of understanding the system, the "take-up" of social services is enhanced. One-shop organization may also provide a means for service providers to obtain information and feedback from beneficiaries, thus helping those professionals to develop longer-term and holistic perspectives concerning users, their needs and problems, and the ways they may best be accommodated. It also provides an excellent entry point for collecting essential information which can be used to evaluate potential demand, plan the provision of services and make adjustments in services according to changing needs.

29. There are often problems associated with dealing effectively with people having multiple problems or needs. The same is true for people whose problems may not be easily or readily defined. An example of the former are homeless schizophrenic drug addicts, who often find themselves being shifted from one agency to another. Each agency may claim that before it can respond properly to the specific problem for which it has competence, the client must get the other problems solved. However, social problems and needs often come in intricate packages which require close cooperation between several agencies. Having one-shop social service centres at the local level may reduce the possibilities that these people will be under-served.

30. Relatives of people with needs are often invisible to the system, since they themselves are rarely eligible for assistance. In particular, children are often neglected, for they seldom command the experience or ability needed to navigate complicated social services bureaucracies nor do they possess the language skills needed to access them. One way to overcome this problem is to open social service centres to all and to train personnel to recognize needs in a more holistic way. This would include consideration of the family situations of potential clients. Personnel should also be trained to talk with and consider the perspectives of relatives of clients, including children.

31. Many countries are experimenting with how to organize social services so that fewer people actually remain recipients of services. Besides a unitary, one-shop, organization, some countries are implementing so-called individual action plans. These plans are set up through a collaborative effort of the social worker and the client, and they are designed to set out the rights and obligations of the user over a given time span. The idea is to spell out what

actions should be taken by the individual concerned and what action should be taken by the agency. Individual action plans thus set out both rights and obligations. Typically, an action plan describes the type and sequencing of services to be provided, such as education, training, and perhaps employment opportunities. Engaging users through their active participation in the formulation of action plans is seen as key for maintaining the quality of services and for enhancing the users' sense of participation, empowerment and, ultimately, self-reliance.

The importance of civil society

32. Provision of social services has been a long-standing activity of the non-governmental sector. Many useful services which are now funded or provided by government and regarded as essential parts of service delivery in many countries were initially conceived and introduced by non-governmental organizations. These include different forms of child care, home care for frail and older people, respite facilities for care givers, and assistance to people who are unemployed.

33. In the overall equation of social service provision, side-by-side with a multitude of community-based efforts, non-governmental organizations play an important role in many countries. While the nature or extent of the voluntary component in these organizations varies substantially — and they typically combine both volunteers and salaried staff and participation — the driving force behind the non-governmental organization is usually a concern for the well-being of its members and partners, and not the material interests of service providers.

34. Non-governmental organizations have also been advocates on behalf of under-served people and their unmet needs, pointing out to governments the need for greater action in the delivery of social services and acting as catalysts for action. The adequacy and effectiveness of social services is highly dependent on innovation and advocacy activities by the non-governmental organizations. As many non-governmental organizations have become more dependent on government funding, and with the conditions of funding often quite prescriptive, there is a danger that much innovation and advocacy will be undermined. It is therefore important that governments recognize, respect and support innovation and advocacy by the organizations of civil society.

35. At the same time, it is important that non-governmental organizations be held accountable and that they maintain the same standards of quality as public or private for-profit service providers. Irrespective of the motivations of the providers, all clients of services deserve to be served in a manner commensurate with their needs and at a comparable level and quality of service. It is appropriate for non-governmental organizations that receive public funds or are sub-contracted by the State to provide services to be under some form of governmental supervision. It would also be advisable for all non-governmental organizations to submit their activities to monitoring, through appropriate, mutually agreed mechanisms designed to ensure high standards, at least a minimum of coordination, and some rationality in the range of services offered by all providers.

IV. Building partnerships

36. The growth of partnerships among all the actors concerned with social services is a major new development, essential for enhancing service delivery. Partnerships are important for the provision of services generally and were recognized as such at the World Summit for Social Development. In the context of this workshop, the issue of partnerships for the benefit of the under-served populations will be considered.

37. Action to meet the needs of under-served populations should be promoted by national Governments, which have primary responsibility to ensure that basic services are available to all. The importance of governmental commitment to providing social services and the extent to which they can influence outcomes are demonstrated by the fact that countries of similar economic capacity have managed to provide very different levels of service. While Governments will have primary responsibility for ensuring that services are provided, this does not mean that they will be primarily responsible for service provision or that decisions about how services are delivered should be theirs alone. Decisions about service provision must be made with the full involvement of all stakeholders, with particular emphasis on users and local communities.

38. There is also a need to ensure that the formulation, implementation and follow-up processes of national social services policies and programmes are accorded commitment from the highest political levels, taking into account the national priorities and realities arising from different socio-economic and cultural development contexts. Action by national Governments may also need to be augmented by international support.

39. In order to address the diverse and changing needs of the under-served populations, there is a need for true

partnership among the various actors providing social services. It may be considered that effective partnership exists when the following elements are in place:

(a) Shared goals;

(b) A sense of equality among the partners;

(c) Mutual acceptance of divergent views;

(d) Joint decision-making;

(e) Joint "ownership" of the process and its outcomes.

40. The partners to be involved should include all the actors concerned with service provision as well as all the stakeholders involved in that provision, including the under-served populations. There should be an attempt to form consensus on the establishment and definition of needs, on the mechanisms for intervention, and on the process for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the outcomes.

41. Strengthening responsible, equal and full partnership between all key stakeholders can be achieved through institutionalized and recognized formal mechanisms or platforms. Such mechanisms should ensure genuine partnership, especially in decision-making processes, in order to create synergies to better address the issues on social services. Some countries have established consultative councils at the national and provincial levels through which the Government and other stakeholders meet on a regular basis to formulate social service policies and programmes. All countries are encouraged to establish such mechanisms.

42. Every effort should be made to facilitate the participation of under-served populations in decision-making processes. As has already been stated, this will help to improve services. But more importantly, because most people consider basic social services to be essential to their well-being, it is relatively easy to encourage them to become involved in their planning and delivery. Most people understand the need for services and are willing to participate in their organization. Thus, planning and delivering social services can become a means for engaging people, for facilitating their participation in society, and ultimately, for leading to their greater empowerment.

43. The adoption of approaches that integrate the provision of different social services into one programme is also to be encouraged, especially in order to improve the provision of services to populations currently under-served.

Coordination

44. Currently, there is often no coordination among the various actors responsible for service delivery, and the result is seen in competition for clients and financing, service duplication, and squandering of resources. Better coordination is called for, with regard to sharing information, planning activities, implementing services and sharing lessons learnt. It is important for various sectors to agree and define their respective roles and, in particular, the critical role of government. There is also a need to consider international agreements and commitments in the context of local conditions.

45. Often coordination is lacking in both horizontal and vertical dimensions, which results in wasteful competition for resources and attention, duplication of efforts, inefficiencies and, ultimately, under-service to many clients. On the horizontal dimension, this may be seen in the practice of shifting users from one agency to another in order to cut costs (by, for instance, cutting case loads at a particular agency). Or the goal may be to give the appearance of increased productivity (by, for instance, "skimming" clients whose problems are easily resolved in order to obtain a higher degree of "successful cases"). But cutbacks sometimes may result in increased costs. One agency's savings may simply be shifted to another agency, and ultimately, both individuals and society may lose out in this shifting of clients and costs. Within agencies dealing with multiple needs, there are examples of similar practices, often made in response to the availability of funding rather than client need.

46. The vertical dimension concerns the level of social services available to a given client. In this context as well, there are examples of agencies shifting clients and costs back and forth. Long-term care of frail elderly persons provides a case in point. Sometimes regional authorities have tried to release older patients from hospitals and refer them to social care at the local level, while at the same time, local authorities try to push them in the other direction. Both regional and local authorities are in this way thinking of the well-being of their programmes or agencies rather than the welfare of the elderly clients. Such a situation demands better coordination and the thoughtful design of programme and resource allocation across different levels of service provision.

47. Coordination of social services is particularly important as far as the under-served population is concerned. Their needs are often multiple, as are the disadvantages they suffer. Even in societies with well developed social services,

users frequently fall through the gaps. A good service system is one that ensures that the work of different agencies is coordinated properly at various levels (societal, local and case).

48. Many under-served people live in deprived neighbourhoods. Some live in shanty towns or have no fixed abode. Community-based agencies operating integrated service teams are often effective in helping hard-to-reach people. The homeless often respond better to workers from community-based or non-governmental organizations than to workers from state agencies. However, after initial contacts and motivation to get help have been built up, it is inevitable that the under-served must gain entry to the state service system. Non-governmental organizations should work continuously with public agencies to monitor whether the referred persons are helped.

49. Rural communities tend to be neglected by service systems, resulting in under-provision and poor quality programmes. Urban bias runs deep, and it is unrealistic to expect redress in the near future. Nevertheless, Governments must recognize urban bias as a sort of discrimination and commit themselves to allocating more resources to rural social development. Relying on state aid alone is too passive. Rural communities must be galvanized to engage in self-help and mutual help endeavours.

Requirements for information

50. Information represents both an enabling factor and an instrument to re-engineer the organization and delivery of essential social services for all. As an enabling factor, information can both engage and empower under-served populations to obtain service coverage, to access services and to use essential services to improve levels of living and livelihoods. Information also provides clients with an instrument to re-engineer services, so that they respond more effectively to actual needs and are delivered in an efficient and effective manner.

51. Often, there is a lack of communication or sharing of information between professionals and other service providers, on the one hand, and clients or user communities, on the other. This can result in a failure to recognize the knowledge, skills and abilities of people to define their own needs, and ignores whatever efforts they may have already undertaken to solve their problems. It is also likely to result in the design of programmes that are inappropriate or unwanted, leading to lack of participation, poor results and under-service for large segments of the population. The question of whose knowledge and information shape service delivery must be addressed.

52. Information as an instrument for re-engineering service design and provision involves dialogue on the mission of service providers, the needs of clients, and the means of improving the range and delivery of essential services. Information that is to serve as both an enabling factor and re-engineering tool must be accessible to all people. In the first instance, information must convey clear and distinct messages and be sensitive to local traditions and values. Information must also be accessible to all people, including persons with physical and sensorial disabilities.

53. Acquiring information is the first step to securing access to social services. Blockages to the free flow of information should be removed where they exist. Information regarding social services should be easy to understand, and displayed or distributed in places where people live, work or congregate. Pictures, cartoons and personal explanations are effective in reaching children, older persons, the illiterate and poorly educated persons. Disseminating information in service centres has advantages: it allows for inspection of programmes, facilitates deeper explanation and individual follow-through, and enhances user confidence. It also has disadvantages, particularly if the location is inconvenient or if it creates costs of access or encourages staff inertia.

54. Multiple channels of information should be created. Service information can be provided via Web sites, mobile stations, public education campaigns, telephone hotlines, and the media. Pamphlets can be passed out in community agencies, government departments, public transport stations and specially established information counters. Citizens' advice bureaus, referral agencies and welfare rights organizations are also effective in easing access and ensuring fair treatment of the under-served, especially people who lack the skills to negotiate complex bureaucratic systems and people suffering from social stigma who would otherwise lack the confidence to assert their rights.

55. Information technology is a powerful tool. It can be particularly useful to disabled and home-bound people. Availability, however, is often restricted by the high costs entailed. Many people, especially the under-privileged, lack the necessary money, equipment, education and knowledge to access electronic information. It is often expensive to set up and maintain information technology systems; this is also true for training the staff needed to operate them.

56. Public agencies must devote more resources to spreading the use of information technology as a service-facilitating device. Communal facilities can be set up in

public libraries, neighbourhood agencies, places of worship, schools, community centres, and government offices to allow people to have access to such information, preferably with the help of staff or volunteers. Information technology has become increasingly important, and its importance can be expected to increase over time. If the populations that are already under-served are denied its use, or they are in danger of falling yet further behind the general population.

57. Radio and especially television transmission is proving highly effective in spreading information about services and bringing awareness to people. For example, information about good practices regarding health care and preventive medicine may be widely disseminated — even to remote communities — through radio and television broadcasts. There are important opportunities for partnership and close collaboration between government and the media, public and private, in providing information and promoting better practices.

58. The media should be encouraged to take a more active role in reaching out to under-served populations. Improved technologies and decreasing costs of transmission make it possible to reach people who may be illiterate or speak minority languages and dialects. Distance learning and distance diagnostics, linked to computerized databases, are also making it possible to bring high quality services to remote communities at costs that are a fraction of those typically associated with the conventional network of schools, clinics and medical specialists.

Rights and responsibilities

59. Efforts to extend access to basic services for the under-served must be linked to issues of governance and rights. Without the political will to provide services in an inclusive way, the prospects for reaching the under-served will remain severely limited. Political will, in turn, is more likely to be present in contexts where Governments are committed to upholding people's rights.

60. Three types of rights are of particular importance in relation to services. These are the right to inclusion, the right to participation, and the right to accountability. All citizens are holders of rights in equal measure and therefore have equal rights to basic services and to social protection. Similarly, all citizens have the right to participate in public decision-making that affects their well-being or their opportunities to develop. They also have the right to call providers to account for the type and quality of services they use and for which they pay, directly or indirectly.

61. Rights, however, carry responsibilities. In demanding inclusion, citizens must be willing to include others; in demanding participation, they must also be willing to contribute; and in demanding accountability, they must be willing to use services responsibly and in ways that do not deny others their rights to use them too. Appropriate consideration of the rights and responsibilities of resident non–citizens must also be included, in their interest and that of the host community at large.

62. Adopting a rights-based approach marks an important step in ensuring social services for all, and has a direct bearing on central issues of governance and on the institutional arrangements through which services are provided. An appreciation for people's rights also encourages service providers to seek the knowledge required to understand and respond to the varying needs of different groups within society and hence reduce the likelihood that the needs of some groups will be overlooked. It will not change the reality, however, that services are often provided in circumstances of severe resource constraint. A rights–based approach does not mean that people can expect to receive everything at once. It does mean, however, that they can expect to be involved actively in the processes through which difficult decisions are made with regard to rationing and resource allocation and through which quality control is managed.

63. In implementing a rights-based approach, some mechanism should also be established to allow people to appeal decisions and seek redress of grievances. For example, some countries and localities have established offices or systems of ombudsmen.

64. A focus on rights and governance does not provide a panacea but is critical in helping to create the conditions under which services can genuinely be made available to all and in helping to support inclusive processes which should accelerate progress towards the achievement of that goal.

V. Resources and financing

65. Many different actors contribute to the provision of social services, each bringing a particular mix of resources to the task, including resources in kind, in time, in skills and knowledge, in organizational and administrative capacity, and in finance. The provision of adequate services, and particularly their expansion to under-served populations, in terms of both quantity and quality of services, requires appropriate resource mobilization and allocation — in most

cases this means more resources — as well as improved use and coordination of the resources available.

66. Resources are augmented by their efficient usage. Allocative efficiency could be improved by redefining the roles, rules and incentives applicable to the various players within the system, enhancing the involvement of a variety of service providers, increasing a focus on outcomes rather than inputs as a means of allocating resources, and enabling greater user participation in the definition and evaluation of the services provided.

67. A critical element is the availability of public resources to finance and support publicly provided services and to stimulate and complement private and voluntary provision, as appropriate, and their more effective and efficient use to meet stated objectives.

68. A comparison of countries with similar levels of public spending on particular services shows vast differences in terms of the results obtained. Similarly, countries at comparable levels of income allocate very different amounts to publicly provided or supported services, which also translates into very different outcomes in terms of social indicators.

69. The current state of affairs in the provision of social services across the board thus suggests that there is vast scope for improvement in the allocative efficiency of current expenditures within the public sector and a need to increase the overall amount of public resources dedicated to these activities in many countries.

70. The pool of public resources may be enlarged in various ways, through the imposition, for example, of user fees and co-payments for services, obligatory — and typically earmarked — contributions such as payroll or social security taxes, and through various forms of public borrowing, such as the issuance of bonds and other financial instruments.

71. While recognizing the contribution that these different financing modalities can make to enlarge the pool of resources available to finance social services, a strong preference was expressed for financing publicly provided social services largely from national general revenues, for reasons of both equity and efficiency.

72. To expand such revenues, several proposals were advanced. Broadening the tax base was seen as particularly important. This could frequently be achieved by increasing the share of direct taxes in the overall revenue mix. Improved tax administration, important particularly in many developing countries, could be sought, *inter alia*, by collecting taxes at the source and doing so at frequent intervals, and reducing tax exemptions and rebates.

73. Tax exemptions and other concessions are, in effect, expenditures. They constitute what can be called the invisible welfare state, although they are rarely acknowledged as such or monitored in the same way as direct public expenditures. This raises issues of efficiency and equity of tax benefits which at the moment are not addressed in most countries. It is recommended that these expenditures be reported and discussed on the same basis and in line with other expenditures to ensure transparency in the setting of national priorities and in assessing the benefits and burdens on different groups of the population.

74. In recent years various countries have experimented with differing forms of privatized services or benefits, seeking to transfer responsibility from state to private provision, and have mobilized funds privately as opposed to publicly. In considering the respective merits of the alternatives and to make a full appraisal of their cost-effectiveness, account must be taken of the cost of tax concessions enjoyed by the private alternatives.

Training for effectiveness and efficiency

75. Discussions of the quality and effectiveness of service provision often neglect the important question of adequate and appropriate staff training. An even more neglected aspect is the question of working conditions and the impact they have on staff motivation. This has implications not just for ensuring the quality of services but also for the degree to which providers will be willing to participate in discussions with actual and potential users on all aspects of what services are offered and how they are administered and delivered. The link between staff training, motivation and working conditions needs to be stressed. Trained staff are better motivated; trained staff who enjoy reasonable working conditions are motivated even more. It has been clearly shown that improved motivation and greater effectiveness go hand-in-hand. While training requires the expenditure of resources, it represents a prudent investment with a significant return. It is important that training be extended also to people staffing non-governmental organizations, including volunteers. At the same time, flexibility in recruitment is required, stressing actual skills rather than rigidly insisting on formal educational qualifications.

VI. International factors and external influences

76. The Social Summit gave due prominence to the external environment and the diverse ways in which it shapes possibilities for social development at the national and local levels. The Workshop recognized that external influences also affect the provision and capacity of supporting social services. It considered, briefly, two: globalization, and the flow of ideas.

77. Globalization, increased mobility of capital, the rapid development of footloose industries and sharpened international competition have affected the range of services and the choices in respect to sources of revenue to finance them. The danger of downward harmonization of social services was noted, as countries try to avoid imposing tax burdens on capital and industries which might flee otherwise to locations offering tax incentives. A similar phenomenon, mentioned above, also affects the capacity of localities within countries to raise needed revenue, which in turn curtails their ability to offer the services that local circumstances might warrant.

78. In an era of globalization, goods and capital are becoming increasingly mobile while labour (that is, people) and land remain significantly less mobile. In tandem with technological advances, these mobile factors are likely to become still more mobile, and tax evasion may grow. One example is trade via the Internet, which to some extent bypasses national regulation concerning the collection of revenue. For this reason, national tax systems may have to be reformed so as to adapt to a changing world. One possibility is to introduce or increase taxation on land and luxury housing or other immobile assets. While this may not be a popular measure, particularly as it is likely to affect the more advantaged and, therefore, vociferous groups in society, it may continue to give Governments the possibility to raise revenue to support improved social services.

79. To the extent that globalization has enabled some countries to attract external investment leading to accelerated economic growth and thus an expanded revenue base, it has had a potentially positive impact on social provision. It is clear, however, that the international financial crisis of the past 12 months is having a negative impact in many countries, particularly with regard to their capacity to support social services, and is thus immensely complicating the task of expanding services and improving their quality.

80. The flow of ideas globally and the exchange of experience among countries are other forms of external influence. It was noted that there were two opposite tendencies in the social domain. One was to reject everything that was foreign, on the reasoning that each country's situation was unique and that external influences tended to be irrelevant at best or to undermine local uniqueness and cultural identity at worst. In the other, foreign ideas were espoused and adopted without due attention to their appropriateness. Both these extremes should be avoided. While the Workshop did not discuss this issue in any detail, the clear message was that learning from the experience of others had an important role in the development of policy and that external influences, if properly evaluated, could encourage valuable, and needed, innovation.

81. The experiences of different countries, in terms of policy making, planning and implementation of the provision and resourcing of social services, should be shared through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including in the form of regional and international forums, seminars and workshops. These exchanges should, however, recognize the reality of each country and should not be dominated by a single approach or perspective.

82. The planning and implementation of social service activities have been and continue to be influenced by factors which are sometimes outside the control of the individual countries, communities and individuals affected or involved. Ongoing civil and international conflicts, financial crises and natural disasters around the world (including volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tidal waves and floods) have had severe impacts on the efficacy and efficiency in the delivery of social services. These situations challenge the capacity of the affected countries to ensure sustained delivery of basic social services for all, especially to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

83. Globalization is a fact of life. It should be based on genuine cooperation and partnership among and within countries, reflecting the principles of equality and justice in the development, management and consumption of the world's resources. At present, neo-liberal policies, which have so far mostly benefited those individuals, groups and societies that are already wealthy or advantaged rather than — and sometimes at the expense of — the poor, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and under-served, have dominated the discourse on globalization. This situation directly affects the provisioning and resourcing of social services especially, but not exclusively, in the developing countries.

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84. It has now been three-and-a-half years since Heads of State and Government met at Copenhagen at the World

Summit for Social Development. The commitments they made there and the programme of action they adopted to achieve those commitments provide the best statement ever made of global priorities for social action. Social progress and social development are long-term propositions, and while it would perhaps be too optimistic to think that significant results might already have been achieved, what is important is that global awareness, concern and momentum be maintained and that they be turned into effective actions at all levels by all social actors. In doing this, it is essential that the role and contribution of social service provision be carefully considered so that improvements can be continually introduced. Considering the issue of service provision in terms of populations which are under-served may promote improved services, because it promotes closer analysis of those services and their efficiency and effectiveness. The Commission for Social Development has recognized the importance of social services for all and is encouraged to continue to give priority attention to this subject.

List of Participants

Experts

Saifuddin Abdullah (Malaysia)
Anna Batrome (Uganda)
Judith Borden de Zeman (Venezuela)
Ron Chandran-Dudley (Singapore)
Julio A. Espinosa Aguilera (Cuba)
Balazs Heidrich (Hungary)
Jon Kvist (Denmark)
Alison McClelland (Australia)
John Milimo (Zambia)
David Nyamwaya (Kenya)
Lavinia Padarath (Fiji)
Sylvia Saborio (Costa Rica)
Geedreck Uswatte-Aratchi (Sri Lanka)
Linda Wong (Hong Kong, China)

Observers

Meherunnissa Rehmani (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

Nguyen Kim-Xuan (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

Uwe Lohse (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements)

Gunnar Wiessner (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements)

Riku Warjovaara (United Nations Children's Fund)

Henrik Bjorn (United Nations Development Programme)

Mikayo Yamazaki (United Nations Development Programme)

Ingeborg Ponne (International Labour Organization)

Sumalee Arayakosol (International Labour Organization)

Malama Meleisea (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

Phil Evans (Department for International Development, United Kingdom)

Host organization

National Institute of Development Administration
Sukhapiban 2 Road
Bangkapi, Bangkok 10240
Thailand

Dr. Anumongkol Sirivedhin, President
Suchitra Punyaratabandhu
Nareewan Chintakanonda
Chindalak Vadhanasindhu
Jirawan Bhakdiputra
Juree Vichit-Vadakan
Tun Lin Moe
Kanokarn Anukensarn

Secretariat

Department of Economic and Social Affairs,
Division for Social Policy and Development

Andrzej Krassowski
Clinton Rapley
Bob Huber